

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001493

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [KIPR](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#) [IPR](#)

SUBJECT: NEW MINISTER OF INFORMATION HOPES TO DISSOLVE
MINISTRY, PLEDGES AGGRESSIVE ACTION ON INTELLECTUAL
PROPERTY RIGHTS

REF: KUWAIT 1349

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: In an introductory meeting with Ambassador, new Minister of Information Dr. Anas Al-Rasheed said that he would consider himself a successful minister if he were able to dissolve the ministry. He said that he is committed to freedom of the press and would work with the National Assembly to pass a liberal Press and Publications Law. He pledged "aggressive" action on intellectual property rights (IPR). Al-Rasheed said that he had already met with Minister of Interior Shaykh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah and Commerce Minister Abdullah Al-Taweel on this issue, and that he would work to form a joint committee comprised of the Ministries of Information, Interior, and Commerce to address enforcement issues. In the past, the Ministry of Information has lagged behind these other stakeholders in Kuwait's IPR protection efforts, and post has encouraged the ministry to cede its enforcement function to the Ministry of Interior. Al-Rasheed's recognition of Interior's role, and his apparent willingness to work with the other ministries sends a positive signal regarding future Kuwaiti IPR action. END
SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

"I Will Be Successful In This Post
If I Am The Last Minister."

¶12. (C) Al-Rasheed wasted no time in sharing with the Ambassador his primary goal: the dissolution of the ministry. "I will be successful in this post if I am the last minister," Al-Rasheed said. Al-Rasheed briefly admitted that this was far easier said than done, but expressed his belief that a Ministry of Information had little function in a free society. "We will have to see how this will work," Al-Rasheed said. "Ensha'allah (God willing) ..." The Ambassador agreed that Ministries of Information in the Arab World no longer served a useful purpose and congratulated Al-Rasheed on his intention to put himself out of a job. Later in the conversation, the minister said that he was still feeling his way in the ministry and would try to earn some trust before bringing in some associates from the outside.

¶13. (C) Widely hailed by members of the Kuwaiti media upon the announcement of his selection (reftel), Al-Rasheed brings significant journalistic credentials to his new post. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from Arkansas State University, and earned his doctorate from the Southern Illinois University Carbondale. He publishes regularly in academic journals, he said, frequently working with his former Arkansas State professor, Dr. Gil Fowler. The subject of his doctoral thesis was the professional and ethical values of Kuwaiti journalists. Al-Rasheed, who said that at 37-years-old he is likely the youngest minister by far, expressed his reluctance to deal directly with Kuwaiti journalists. He said he preferred to issue written statements rather than give interviews that could be distorted. He cited his experience teaching journalism at Kuwait University, and mentioned his role as senior advisor to the editor-in-chief of Arabic daily Al-Qabas.

"This Would Be A Great Achievement..."

¶14. (C) The minister nodded and appeared to listen intently as the ambassador expressed his concerns about the fate of the draft Press and Publications Law currently before the National Assembly. (Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah has championed a strict draft that would increase penalties for libel and defamation, more harshly regulate newspaper ownership and operation, and ease rules preventing authorities from shutting down newspapers. Members of the media and parliamentarians have expressed strong reservations about the draft.) Al-Rasheed said that he had the file on his desk at that moment, and that he hoped to work with both the Prime Minister and Parliament to resolve the issue satisfactorily. "This would be a great achievement," he said.

¶15. (C) While Al-Rasheed said that he had elicited "conditions" from Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah (Note: He did not say what they were, but the conversation suggested they were in the area of press freedom. End note.) before

accepting the post, he acknowledged that their views on a free press differed. He said that Shaykh Sabah considered Kuwait's newspapers "ambassadors," and was troubled when news that could be perceived as negative appeared in the press. "In a free society, this is how newspapers should look like (sic)," Al-Rasheed said he told the Prime Minister. "If you have everything fine (in the press), we are talking about Saddam Hussein now."

IPR: "Our Country Is Looking Bad..."

16. (C) Responding to Ambassador LeBaron's assessment of the ministry's performance on IPR issues ("we've had some good and not-so-good experiences..."), Al-Rasheed said that he and his ministry would work "a lot harder." He said that he had already met with Commerce Minister Al-Taweel and Interior Minister Shaykh Nawwaf. Told by the economic counselor that post had suggested in the past transferring some aspects of enforcement from Information to Interior, Al-Rasheed said that he hoped to form a joint committee with Interior and Commerce to work together on enforcement. Econ/C suggested that Kuwaiti Customs be involved. "Our country is looking bad," Al-Rasheed admitted. Al-Rasheed said that there were problems with the laws, which prevented enforcement officers from entering closed shops in hopes of seizing pirated goods, and that the government often lacked follow up. But he suggested a radio and television IPR awareness campaign, and said, "With time you'll see, Mr. Ambassador, I'll be very aggressive in this area."

Biographical Information

17. (C) Bio Data: As the meeting concluded, Al-Rasheed spoke about his family. He said that he has 15 brothers, and that his father, a former pearl diver with no formal education, had three wives. Al-Rasheed is the son of his father's youngest, and final, wife. (He wryly noted the complexities of having a mother who is younger than some of his sisters.) Al-Rasheed's was a long-time member of the National Assembly, who, he said, is still very well-respected. He said that an uncle, Abdul Aziz Al-Rasheed, is the "Father of Kuwaiti Journalism" -- having established, in 1928, Kuwait's first magazine, called, "Kuwait Magazine." He said that his sister was "the first or second" female lawyer in Kuwait. Al-Rasheed has more connections to the U.S. than just his education. He said that while he was in school in the U.S. during the first Gulf War, he volunteered to serve with the U.S. Army and trained at Fort Dix, N.J. He said that he counseled family members of American servicemen and women who died during the war. and that as an active member of the Kuwait Foundation, a Kuwaiti organization dedicated to improving U.S.-Kuwaiti ties, he was involved in organizing receptions and exchanges for Americans and Kuwaitis. He has also participated in exchanges with journalism students from his alma mater, Arkansas State. He said that one of his daughters was born in the U.S. in 1995, while he was in school.

LEBARON